

# PROJECT UPDATES

Spring 2009



## OVERVIEW

The Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is a powerful new tool being used to achieve NOAA's mission of safeguarding the long-term health and productivity of our shared marine resources. The focus of the program is on saltwater recreational fishing, which generates an estimated \$82 billion in sales and supports over 500,000 jobs annually. MRIP is changing the way recreational fishing data is collected and reported to help ensure that managers, anglers, and other stakeholders have the complete and reliable information necessary to fairly and sustainably manage fish stocks and their surrounding ecosystems for generations to come.

MRIP will maximize the accuracy and utility of fishing data by employing flexible, targeted, and regionally based information-gathering programs that adhere to a set of consistent national standards. Implementation is occurring nationwide in a process that involves three overlapping phases.

- **Evaluation Phase** – Independent experts are being used as part of an exhaustive evaluation of existing tools to determine which are effective at meeting management and science needs. This phase began in 2006 and current results are driving the innovations being tested in phase 2.
- **Innovation Phase** – New methods of collecting and analyzing data are being developed and tested. Numerous such projects, described below, are underway and will begin yielding results by the spring of 2009.
- ◆ **Activation Phase** - As new and more reliable data collection methods are implemented, we will continue to improve survey coverage so that timely and accurate information is available when and where it's needed.

## NEARLY \$1 MILLION IN NEW DATA IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS FUNDED

In May 2009, NOAA Fisheries announced \$843,000 in new funding to support 12 MRIP projects. This is on top of the more than \$1 million allocated in 2008 to jumpstart the work of expert work groups tasked with evaluating and recommending improvements to data collection in five critical areas.

The latest funding will build upon that work by launching new projects and expanding on existing initiatives. For example, the **for-hire work group** recently issued a series of recommendations on strategies to improve data collected from party and charter boats. The complete document is available online at [www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov](http://www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov), but the report's chief recommendation was to move away from telephone surveys and toward universal electronic logbook reporting. Several of the newly funded projects for 2009 will pilot test this recommendation by developing electronic logbooks, examining ways to validate this self-reported data, and improving the statistical reliability of dockside or onboard sampling on for-hire boats.

Other projects (listed below) will improve the surveys by expanding coverage of fishing participants and reducing potential bias; improving and expanding counting methods for released fish, certain types of fishing, and non-licensed anglers; developing standards across states and regions to make



data more comparable; and creating new counting methods related to highly migratory fisheries of special concern.

## IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

**Key issues:** *Management decisions are based on data that must be comprehensive, detailed, and accurate. Ensuring surveys and subsequent analysis meet these needs is the principal task of the **Design and Analysis Work Group**. It is working to ensure we have as clear a picture as possible of what species we're catching, how many we're catching, where we're catching them, and when we're catching them.*

### Design and Analysis Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase    ■ = Innovation Phase    ◆ = Activation Phase

- Developed comprehensive documentation of current sampling and estimation procedures for existing recreational fishing surveys. Revised estimation procedures for the MRFSS to better match current sampling designs. The resulting catch estimates are being compared to past estimates. **Timeframe:** *New estimation procedures will be implemented in 2009.*
- Conducting an analysis that compares angler reports of discarded catch to direct observations of discarded catch by trained observers. This analysis will help assess the effectiveness and accuracy of the methods currently used to collect recreational fishing discard data. **Timeframe:** *Discard analysis will be completed in early 2009.*
- **NEW for 2009** - As part of the license survey project, developed an estimation program that integrates independent telephone surveys of fishing effort in a dual-frame approach. Components of the dual-frame design include surveying licensed saltwater anglers (which improves the efficiency of data collection) and random surveying of coastal households, which addresses license exemptions. **Timeframe:** *The program was implemented in the Gulf of Mexico in 200, North Carolina in 2008, and it is expected to be expanded to Washington in 2009.*
- **NEW for 2009** - As part of the license survey project, developed a sample design for a dual-frame mail survey that will be tested as an alternative to telephone surveys of recreational fishing effort. Mail surveys could potentially provide better coverage than telephone surveys because they are not complicated by such issues as cell phone use. **Timeframe:** *Dual frame mail survey pilot project scheduled to be implemented in late 2009.*
- **NEW for 2009** - Developed a methodology to test for differences in catch rate, angler characteristics, and behavior between trips sampled by field interviewers and trips that are not sampled due to factors including private property restrictions or the remoteness of the location. **Timeframe:** *Project scheduled to be implemented in late 2009.*
- Supported efforts of California Department of Fish and Game to develop and implement a panel study of recreational anglers that will test for differences in catch rates and angler behavior between private-access and public-access fishing trips. **Timeframe:** *Panel study was implemented in 2008 and will continue through 2009.*
- **NEW for 2009** –Developed a study design to test an alternative approach for collecting catch data in onsite surveys. The survey will seek to ensure probability-based sampling, limiting the freedom of field samplers to conduct surveys at alternative fishing sites and alternative fishing modes, and collecting catch information for both day- and night-time fishing trips. **Timeframe:** *Pilot study implemented in 2009.*



## IMPROVED DATA MANAGEMENT

**Key issues:** Proper analysis requires a clear understanding of the characteristics of data, both its strengths and limitations. *The **Data Management and Standards Work Group** is making sure that managers and scientists understand how data are generated so that the data are used properly.*

### Data Management and Standards Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase    ■ = Innovation Phase    ◆ = Activation Phase

- **NEW for 2009** - Documenting existing data collection quality control programs to evaluate their effectiveness in limiting error introduced during data collection, processing, and estimation.  
**Timeframe:** *Report due December 2009.*
- Supporting redesign of Pacific RecFIN website to provide better access to recreational catch, effort, and field sample data for managers, stock assessment biologists, and the public.  
**Timeframe:** *Ongoing throughout 2009.*

## HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

**Key issues:** *Highly migratory species provide a special challenge to fisheries managers. The total number of trips specifically targeting these fish is relatively small and difficult to accurately characterize in a broad survey so a more targeted approach is required.*

### Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase    ■ = Innovation Phase    ◆ = Activation Phase

- Surveyed the HMS private boat fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, and the HMS charter boat fishery off Texas. Approximately 5100 interviews were conducted with HMS permit holders. Survey achieved a 75% response rate. Results will be used to develop future surveys that provide more precise and accurate information. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in 2009.*
- Reviewed tournament operator reports from over 50 HMS tournaments in the northeast region (ME-VA). Conducted interviews with HMS tournament captains at five events. Data collected from tournaments will be compared to information collected through surveys to improve future catch estimation. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in 2009.*
- Implemented survey to characterize HMS private boat fishery in Puerto Rico to improve future catch estimation for billfish and other HMS species. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in 2009.*
- **NEW in 2009** - Explore adaptive sampling methodologies to improve recreational catch estimates of Pacific coast shark species. **Timeframe:** *Project scheduled to be implemented in spring 2009.*
- ◆ **NEW in 2009** - Conducting dockside and telephone interviews with HMS for-hire captains and private anglers throughout Florida to characterize the HMS fishery and estimate HMS catch and effort for an entire tourist season. Results will be used to develop future surveys that provide more precise and accurate information. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in summer 2009.*

## FOR-HIRE VESSELS

**Key issues:** *The for-hire sector – charter boats, 6-packs, guide boats, party boats, and head boats are a mix between commercial and recreational fisheries as far as data is concerned because each*



state has its own licensing and reporting requirements. Since a significant number of fish are taken by for-hire boats, getting an accurate accounting of this sector is a critical management need.

#### For Hire-Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase    ■ = Innovation Phase    ◆ = Activation Phase

- Hired independent statistical consultants to review and provide recommendations specific to for-hire data collection programs on a region-by-region basis. The below pilot projects are designed to test the consultants' recommendations. **Timeframe:** Final report released Spring 2009 and available online.
- Developed and implemented an electronic data collection program for the Puerto Rico for-hire fleet. **Timeframe:** Implemented February 2009.
- **NEW for 2009** - Developing probability based sampling protocols for the southeast head boat intercept survey to reduce individual sampler discretion and ensure a true probability sample. **Timeframe:** Report due September 2009.
- **NEW for 2009** – Developing a dockside charter vessel activity study to independently document trip and catch at one to three major harbors in Hawaii to assess non-compliance and inaccurate reporting. **Timeframe:** Ongoing through July 2010.
- **NEW for 2009** – Develop and test a web-based logbook in cooperation with a subset of eight headboats in the southeastern U.S. **Timeframe:** Final report due October 2010.
- **NEW for 2009** – Designing a method to account for missing data in the headboat fishery of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. **Timeframe:** Final report due May 2010.
- **NEW for 2009** – Designing pilot studies to test the feasibility of a regional logbook reporting program for the for-hire sector in the Gulf of Mexico. The pilot studies will include validation of self-reported data, compliance tracking, non-response follow-up, and methods to adjust for misreporting and non-response. **Timeframe:** Final report due August 2009.

#### NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY

**Key issues:** To more effectively target catch and effort surveys, and to help measure the social and economic impacts of recreational fishermen, NOAA Fisheries is creating a National Saltwater Angler Registry. This “phone book” of saltwater anglers will improve our ability to contact anglers and help to generate a more detailed and comprehensive picture of recreational fishing. In addition, improved information that is viewed as reliable by all parties will empower anglers to engage more effectively on decisions impacting recreational fishing.

#### Angler Registry Team – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase    ■ = Innovation Phase    ◆ = Activation Phase

- ◆ Initiated state exemption process. States and NOAA Fisheries will enter into Memoranda of Agreement whereby exempted states will submit data consistent with the requirements of the final rule and NOAA Fisheries will designate them as exempted states. Coastal states were notified of the final rule and invited to submit a designation proposal. **Timeframe:** Memoranda of Agreements will be adopted as states submit proposals.



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### Angler Registry Database Work Group – Implementation milestones:

- Worked with state license program managers, regional data collection partnerships, and Data Management and Standards Work Group on the requirements for and the ultimate design of the federal-regional registry database or system of databases. **Timeframe:** *Initial requirements, design, and development completed in 2009.*
- ◆ Implementation of state data transmission and national registration. **Timeframe:** *Ongoing as Memoranda of Agreements with states are established.*
- Establishment of quality assurance / quality control and data reconciliation processes. **Timeframe:** *Initial analyses and requirements definition in early 2009. Documentation and implementation to be completed by end of 2009.*
- Establish requirements for sample generation, reporting, and survey feedback. **Timeframe:** *End of 2009.*
- ◆ Create interfaces for sample generation, reporting, and survey feedback. **Timeframe:** *Ongoing beginning in 2010.*

### COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

**Key issues:** *Effective communications among those who collect, analyze, and rely on data for making critical decisions is a fundamental component of MRIP. The long-term success of the program will be built upon open dialogue and continued engagement among all stakeholders.*

### Communication and Education Team – Implementation milestones:

- ✓ Generated 40+ articles in 2008 on MRIP in both trade publications and the general media including an ongoing series of three articles in *The Fisherman* magazine.
- ✓ Placed several op-eds and targeted articles in trade publications and daily/weekly newspapers.
- ✓ Coordinated with the Operations Team, the Executive Steering Committee and work groups to develop targeted information – such as brochures, presentations and Web content – to keep stakeholders informed of the MRIP development process and encourage input.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about what the MRIP team is doing to improve data for managing saltwater fishing, or for questions or comments, please visit [www.countmyfish.noaa.gov](http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov). Your feedback is indispensable to the success of the program.